

**Town of Arlington**  
**Town Meeting Procedures Committee**  
*April 10, 2024*

DRAFT MINUTES

**Call to order:** The meeting of the Town Meeting Procedures Committee was called to order by Town Moderator, Greg Christiana, at 7:05pm

**Quorum:** A quorum was present: Adam Auster, Greg Christiana, Rebecca Gruber, Christopher Moore, and John Worden (remote).

Mr. Christiana said that remote participation was authorized by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

**Public Comments:**

- Public comment was taken as part of the discussion on the articles. See below.

**Minutes of Prior Meetings:**

Sept 25, 2023:

Moved approval: Mr. Auster  
Seconded: Mr. Moore  
Vote: unanimous

Jan 4, 2024:

Moved approval: Mr. Moore  
Seconded: Mr. Auster  
Vote: unanimous

**Old Business:**

**Warrant Articles 8 and 9:**

Mr. Christiana shared results of the Dec 2023 Town Meeting Member survey particularly with respect to meeting time preferences.

Ms. Kelleher (Article 9 proponent) spoke about the disadvantages of late meeting end times including members leaving early, difficulties for those who have early morning responsibilities and/or long commutes, and the possibility that the late meeting end time is a deterrent for residents to join Town Meeting.

Ms. Deshler (FinCom chair) spoke of the problems that would likely be encountered if the FinCom, which meets 30 minutes before every session of Town Meeting, were required to start any earlier to accommodate an earlier Town Meeting start time. These include difficulty achieving quorum due to members who commute from employment outside of Arlington and concern that an earlier meeting time would significantly limit the diversity of those who are able

serve on FinCom. In the event that FinCom fails to achieve quorum, it is possible that Town Meeting could be kept waiting for FinCom's recommendation on an article or motion.

Mr. Christiana said that he had received comments from Ms. Zsembery (Arlington Redevelopment Board chair) which largely agreed with Ms. Deshler's concerns.

Mr. Goff (Article 8 proponent) spoke about the benefits of an earlier Town Meeting especially the potential benefits in diversity by avoiding late end times which favor those who have flexibility in their schedules, work from home, etc. The late end time has been a deterrent to some prospective members that he has spoken to.

The Committee discussed the governing bylaw which specifies only the start time of the first session of Town Meeting.

The Committee discussed a framework for recommending a way forward to the Select Board.

Mr. Moore and Mr. Christiana will form a working group to draft a memo to the Select Board recommending actions consistent with the framework discussed. The Committee agreed to meet on April 18, 2024 at 7pm to discuss the memo.

#### **New Business:**

- Ms. Gruber inquired as to whether the vote on Special Town Meeting Article 3 is 2/3 or majority. The Moderator will investigate.
- Ms. Gruber noted that some Annual Town Meeting articles have dependencies on the MBTA Communities map and therefore on the Special Town Meeting. The Moderator took this under advisement.
- The Committee discussed the general process for debate on resolutions. The Moderator will clarify the process in his communication to Town Meeting.

**Adjourn:** The meeting adjourned at 9:24pm.

Moved: Ms. Gruber

Seconded: Mr. Moore

Vote: unanimous

Christopher Moore

## **— DRAFT REPORT —**

Drafted by Greg Christiana and Chris Moore.  
Tuesday, April 16, 2024

- to be voted by Town Meeting Procedures Committee on April 18, 2024
- yellow highlight indicates recommendation for adjusting start time that the Committee may wish to discuss or strike.

## **Town of Arlington**



## **Town Meeting Procedures Committee Report to 2024 Annual Town Meeting**

Greg Christiana, Chair Ex-Officio  
John Worden III  
Adam Auster  
Christopher Moore  
Rebecca Gruber

### **Introduction**

This year two different Citizens' Petitions (Warrant Articles 8 and 9) seek to change the start time of the first night of the Annual Town Meeting, as defined in our Town Bylaws, to 7:30 PM (the scope of Article 8 permits additional changes). Such changes, if approved by Town Meeting, would not take effect until next year.

This report provides recommendations to the Select Board and the Town Moderator to help Town Meeting navigate choices related to these two articles and meeting time.

### **Recommendations**

In order to help Town Meeting gain experience with changes in meeting time, the Town Meeting Procedures Committee recommends that:

1. the Moderator entertain motions to table or postpone Articles 8 and 9 in order to give Town Meeting an opportunity to gain real-world experience with an earlier **start time and end time** on a trial basis before weighing related changes to the Town Bylaws.
2. the Moderator select one meeting date for a **7:30 PM start time**, giving participants, staff, volunteers, and vendors advance notice. At the start of the last meeting before the selected date, the Select Board Chair will move that if business is not completed that night, when the meeting adjourns, it adjourns to the selected date at **7:30 PM**. If this motion fails, the Select Board Chair will make a similar motion, but adjourning to **8 PM instead**.
3. the Moderator entertain motions to adjourn starting around two and half hours into the meeting each evening. As usual, Town Meeting will vote on whether to affirm the motion to adjourn; if that vote fails, the meeting will continue with regular business until there is an affirmative vote to adjourn.

4. the Moderator strictly enforce a ten-minute break at around the halfway point each evening to tighten the proceedings and make more effective use of the meeting's time in anticipation of earlier end times.

In regard to the recommended votes under Articles 8 and 9, the Town Meeting Procedures Committee further recommends that:

5. the Select Board move "no action" under Article 8, possibly from the floor of Town Meeting.
6. the Select Board provide a main motion under Article 9 implementing a start time of 7:30 PM. However, the Town Meeting Procedures Committee takes no position on whether the start time should be changed to 7:30 PM. Given that there are essentially two viable options under Article 9, leaving the start time at 8 PM or changing it to 7:30 PM, the Committee recommends that the Select Board make this motion in order to limit the procedural complexity of deliberation by offering an up-or-down vote on changing the start time to 7:30 PM. (See *Town Meeting Time, 3rd edition*, §40: "reconsideration by thin slices.")

## **Commentary**

The Town Meeting Procedures Committee, having considered input from the Finance Committee Chair, the Redevelopment Board Chair, the proponents of Articles 8 and 9, and responses to relevant questions from last year's Town Meeting Survey, draws the following conclusions:

1. There are three distinct issues worth separating:
  - a. meeting start time
  - b. meeting end time
  - c. where the authority resides for the determination of start time and end time
2. At present, only the start time of the first night of Town Meeting is set in the Town Bylaws. The start time of all subsequent nights of Town Meeting, as well as the end time, is tradition implemented through motions presented to and voted on by the meeting.
3. The scope of Article 8 would permit Town Meeting to consider two other Bylaw changes, which the Procedures Committee considers inadvisable. One would give to the Select Board the authority to alter the start date of the Annual Town Meeting (which is already covered separately under Article 10), and the other would write into the Bylaws a 10:30 PM adjournment time for Town Meeting.
4. Placing a strict limit on the end time of Town Meeting, as Article 8 does, is procedurally problematic. For instance, Town Meeting may fail to reach an affirmative vote on adjournment by the required end time; in such a case, votes taken after that time risk being nullified, leaving the meeting in an ambiguous state. A strict end time would also deprive the Moderator of the discretion to continue the meeting past the end time (even for a few minutes) in order to complete a vote or reach a natural stopping point. Also, Section 10.E of the Town Bylaws (Article 1) requires that any member wishing to reconsider a vote at a subsequent session give "notice of their intention to make such motion at the session of the meeting at which the vote was passed." Under current practice, the Moderator expressly allows members to do so before adjournment. An "automatic" adjournment would complicate this process and could lead to situations in which members wishing to move reconsideration are deprived of their right to do so. Therefore, the

Committee believes it's best that each session of Town Meeting should set its own adjournment time.

5. The proponents of Articles 8 and 9 are most concerned about the late hour of the traditional 11 PM end time and less concerned about where the authority resides for establishing those times, e.g. at the Moderator's discretion vs the Town Bylaws.
6. Boards and committees that do work that is both concurrent with and relevant to Town Meeting – in particular the Finance Committee and the Redevelopment Board – are particularly sensitive to Town Meeting's start time; in particular, earlier start times for Town Meeting may negatively impact the ability of those bodies to achieve quorum and attract diverse membership that lacks the privilege of flexible schedules.
7. Changing the start time for this year's meeting could have an invasive impact on many participants' schedules, whereas ending before 11 PM would only impact participants potentially in terms of the number of evenings that Town Meeting convenes (i.e. shorter meetings may result in more meeting nights). Therefore, pursuing an earlier end time on a trial basis can be done any or all evenings, whereas earlier start times should be considered on a more limited basis and only when sufficiently advance notice can be given to participants, staff, volunteers, and vendors.